

Phasis 8, 2005

Ketevan Nadareishvili (Tbilisi)

LITERATURE AND SOCIAL CONTEXT – WOMEN IN THE GREEK TRAGEDY AND IN CLASSICAL ATHENS

Women issues in the ancient world are subject of current interest in classical philology. Though a lot of problems connected with women in antiquity have caused of debates, woman's social status in Classical Athens and its relationship with women characters of the Greek tragedy seems to be one of the most controversial problems¹.

Study of the issue means, on the one hand, to define the social status of a woman in Classical Athens and, on the other hand, to explain the discrepancy between the low social status of Athenian women if such is admitted and the images of the women of the tragedy, what is considered to be an unprecedented case, paradox from the point of the relations of art and life². Investigation of the above-mentioned controversial issue is of a great importance. First, the elucidation of the issue would make clear how a woman was presented in the artistic and social context of Classical Athens. This would give us the possibility to discuss out ancient models of gender relations, the origins of women emancipation. On the other hand, such discussion appears to be a relevant problem as it concentrates on the relations between literature and social context, a question regarded as very important in the present-day cultural studies. Discussions over these questions started in the 19th century. Scholars have somehow agreed on the first issue – the social status of Athenian wo-

¹ Richter D. C., "The Position of Women in Classical Athens," CJ 67, 1971, 1-8. Pomeroy S.B., "Selected Bibliography on Women in Classical Antiquity", Arethusa 6, 1973, 127-157. Pomeroy S. B., Goddesses, Whores, Wives and Slaves, Women in Classical Antiquity, New York, 1975.

² Gomme A. W., "The Position of Women in the Fifth and Fourth Centuries in Athens", CP 20, 1925, 1-25.

man, while the discrepancy between social status of woman in classical Athens and women images of the Greek tragedy still remains arguable³.

We believe, that the most appropriate theory to study the discrepancy, or we would rather call it interrelation, between the social status of woman and the powerful female characters of the tragedy is the theory of so-called "social conflicts" according to which the nature/ objective of the tragedy was to present "social conflicts", struggle of various cultural values. The tragedy did not render the clash between the main social institutions straightforwardly, but through artistic codes, ciphers it represented a symbolic area for the expression of the "social tensions"⁴. According to this theory, the main social strain lay in the tension between the two most important institutions of the classical epoch – oikos and polis.

Commencing from the complexity of the problem we investigated the issue step by step dedicating a voluminous study to it. In this article we have tried to present briefly the main results of our survey.

Based on the chief postulate of the "social conflicts theory" in studying the problem of the aforementioned discrepancy (or interrelation), first of all we have tried to develop our own methodology. In our opinion in order to explain this discrepancy and to study the conception of a woman presented in the Greek tragedy, it would be appropriate to consider the female characters in a broader context, i.e. the gender system of the tragedy, and to link the latter to the social milieu, namely to the conflict between the oikos and the polis⁵.

In order to find out how the gender system of the drama reflects the tension between these institutions, we considered it relevant to use the binary opposition – woman: domestic × man: public. The supporters of the theory of

³ Foley H. P., "The Conception of Women in Athenian Drama" in (ed.) Foley H. P., *Reflections of Women in Antiquity*, New York, 1986³, 127-168.

⁴ Shaw M., "The Female Intruder: Women in the Fifth-Century Drama", CP 70, 1975, 255-266; Bouvrie S. des, *Women in Greek Tragedy, an Anthropological Approach*, Symb. Osl. Fasc. Supplement 27, 1990; Arthur M. B., "Liberated Women: The Classical Era" in (edd.) Briden-thal R., Koonz C., *Becoming Visible, Women in European History*, 1977, Boston, 60-89; Segal C. P., "The Menace of Dionysus: Sex Roles and Reversals in Euripides' "Bacchae", *Aethusa* 11, 1978, 185-202; Thomson G., *Aeschylus in Athens. A Study in the Social Origins of Drama*, London, 1966²; Vernant J. P., "Tensions et ambiguïtés dans la tragédie grecque" in Vernant J. P., Vidal-Naquet P., *Mythe et tragédie en Grèce ancienne*, Paris, 1973, 19-40; Zeitlin F., "Playing the Other: Theater, Theatricality and the Feminine in Greek Drama" in (ed.) Winkler J. J., Zeitlin F. L., *Nothing to Do with Dionysus: Athenian Drama in its Social Context*, Princeton University Press, 1990.

⁵ The relationship between these spaces appeared to be complex, as they were complementary and antithetical to each other simultaneously. Goldhill S., *Reading Greek Tragedy*, Cambridge, 1986, 144 ...; Arthur, 1977, 190.

"social conflicts" regard this opposition as particularly successful⁶. Along with it we also used another binary opposition: female: nature × male: culture, which also presents the way the gender system of the drama reflects the conflict between the main cultural values of the classical period.

Prior to studying the gender system of the tragedy using these binary oppositions we researched the social status of women in classical Athens. Based on orators' speeches as our main source, we explored the Athenian legislation of the classical period to identify the status of women.⁷

Our study revealed, that woman's state was ambivalent⁸. Woman was deprived of rights in every sphere of the family context. Despite this fact, she accomplished two most important functions for the welfare of oikos. Woman was ousted from the public area; nevertheless, Greeks most seriously considered her civil rights. Consequently, woman, declared as a marginal subject, fulfilled the foremost interests of polis. Woman, deprived of rights, was the key subject for oikos – one of the main institutions of the social context of Athens. For this very reason, Greeks found it highly important that women accomplished their civil rights and duties, which, on the whole, was directed to the "welfare of the state, laws and faith" (Demosthenes, LIX, 114).

After investigating the status Athenian women had in law, we analyzed their daily life⁹. In this respect we studied the following problems: 1. The question of women's segregation; 2. Women and labor activities; 3. Women in the religious sphere.

The study of these problems revealed, that the daily life of women as well as their legal status was of ambivalent nature. In certain cases, women depict-

⁶ Foley, 1986; Zeitlin, 1990.

⁷ Most valuable was the whole corpus of Demosthenes' court speeches: Demosthenes, *Orationes*, ed. S. H. Butcher, v. 1 -2, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966². Demosthenes, *Orationes*, ed. W. Rennie, v. 3, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1960. . Also speeches of Lysias and Isaeus. Isaeus, *Discours*, ed. P. Roussel, Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1960². Lysias, *Discours*, ed. U. Albin, Florence: Sansoni, 1955. For the interpretation of the Athenian legislation concerning family matters see: Harrison A.R.W., *The Law of Athens. Procedure*, Oxford, 1971; Harrison A.R.W., *The Law of Athens. The Family and Property*, Oxford, 1968; Mac Dowell D.M., "The οἶκος in Athenian Law ", CQ 39, №1, 1989; Mac Dowell D.M., *The Law in Classical Athens, Aspects of Greek and Roman life*, London, 1978; Hignett C., *A History of the Athenian Constitution to the End of the Fifth Century B.C.*, Oxford, 1950. Lacey's book "The Family in Classical Greece", London, 1968 is still one of the most significant surveys about the Greek family.

⁸ See Gould J., "Law, Custom and Myth, Aspects of the Social Position of Women in Classical Athens", JHS 100, 1980, 39-59; Just R., "Conceptions of Women in Classical Athens", *Journ. of the Anthropol. Soc. of Oxford* 6. n. 3, 1975, 153-170.

⁹ See especially Blundell S., *Women in Ancient Greece*, London, 1995; Lacey, 1968; Ehrenberg V., *The People of Aristophanes. Sociology of Old Attic Comedy*, Oxford, 1951². Burkert W. F. M., *Greek Religion Archaic and Classical*, Oxford, Basic Blackwell Publisher, 1985.

ed activities despite the fact, that they were deprived of their rights. The cultural ideal also required of them to lead a passive life.

Correspondingly, we may claim that the social context of classical Athens was characterized with tension in connection with woman. The stereotypes established as a result of radical sex policy required revision. On the one hand, the cultural ideal and the norm that limited women's rights and unconditionally assigned them to the family space encountered certain problems; on the other hand, the marginal position of women envisaged by the legislation became questionable. Only after having all this considered, we can regard the social status of Athenian women as low. In Our opinion, the research of the women's social environment in the 5th century B.C. Athens enabled us to turn to Greek tragedy proper in order to investigate the above discrepancy/interrelation between the social status of women and their images in tragedy.

From Aeschylus' works We thoroughly analyzed the "Oresteia", as we believe the trilogy is the most important cultural document in any exploration of the social status and functions of woman presented in Greek literature.¹⁰

Regarding the trilogy two questions were studied: 1. The formation of the new model of relations between the male and female forces; 2. What do the female and male systems of values imply and how the complex interrelations of private and public spaces are represented through female and male gender roles.

The public space in the "Agamemnon" is represented through the actions and speeches of male characters – the herald, Agamemnon and the army (the latter is not an acting character of the play). It should be mentioned that the chorus of Argos old men – a male character – understands the service to the public space differently from the mentioned male characters and regards them critically. The survey revealed, that from the author's perspective, Agamemnon and the army carry out public interests in a wrong way as their service to the public area represents the extreme military domination¹¹ (such an impression is produced not only by sacrificing Iphigenia, but also by the behavior of Agamemnon and the army in the course of the whole war, their hybris). While analyzing Agamemnon's role, we accentuated another circumstance as well, which also caused Agamemnon's defeat. The commander not only fails to understand the service to the public space correctly, but he is also inclined

¹⁰ Smith S. H., *Twentieth-Century Plays Using Classical Myths, a Checklist*, in: *Modern Drama* XXIX, 1986, 1; Zeitlin F., "The Dynamics of Misogyny: Myth and Mythmaking in the "Oresteia," *Women in the Ancient World, the Arethusa Papers*, edited by J. Peradotto and J.P. Sullivan, State University of New York Press, Albany, 1984, 159-194.

¹¹ Gagarin M., *Aeschylean Drama*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1976.

to barbaric values – to the luxury and satisfaction of his desires, which is associated with the female phenomenon and correspondingly prevents the male to fulfill his cultural role¹².

Clytemnestra represents the female perspective of the tragedy. We have considered the dispute held in classical philology over her character. Scholars argue over how to regard Clytemnestra – as an androgenic female or as the woman different from ordinary ones, as she knows much more than they do and can check her emotions.¹³ We analyzed in detail the passages, that present Clytemnestra from this point and draw a conclusion, that Aeschylus purposefully pictures Clytemnestra as a masculine female, which is testified by: a. Insistent accentuation of the intellectual abilities of the queen; b. Acceptance of the masculine part in the intercourse with her partners; 3. A string of Clytemnestra's activities: infidelity to her husband, choosing her sex partner on her own; premeditation and accomplishment of her husband's murder. However, the analysis showed, that the system of the queen's values is chiefly comprised of female ones – for example, she perceives the war, the public space, from the female perspective. Agamemnon's wife is insistent while explaining how greatly matrimonial relations suffer, on the one hand, from the war and its requirements (sacrificing Iphigenia), and on the other hand, from husband's abandonment of the family space.

The study of Clytemnestra's character revealed, that she is a complex image, i.e. she is not presented from the start as an altogether negative woman. The queen's intellect, her superiority over her partners and her powerfulness, as well as Aeschylus' critical attitude to the male values implied in the "Agamemnon" prompts to regard Clytemnestra, to a certain extent, as the "shrewd political rebel" against the existing regime¹⁴. However, along with it, Clytemnestra's image is gradually associated with the wild world. At first, this takes place at the mythopoetic level. Cassandra connects her with the dark, monstrous female forces. Eventually, it is Clytemnestra's own activities that altogether turn her into the negative phenomenon – she kills her husband, kills Agamemnon, who neglected family interests. But in fact, through this deed, the queen herself becomes the violator of oikos' interests. Remarkably, according to the Aeschylean gynocratic myth, Clytemnestra's activities, as of the negative female phenomenon, do not end with the murder of her husband; the queen usurps the power, and, eventually, she and her lover Aegis-

¹² Podlecki A. J., "Aeschylus' Women," *Helios* 10, 1983, 23-47, 31-47 and Blundell, 1995, 174.

¹³ Zeitlin, 1984; Pomeroy, 1975; Foley, 1986, 151; Blundell, 1995, 174; they regard Clytemnestra as a masculine female, for the opposite viewpoint see: Lefkowitz M. R., *Die Töchter des Zeus, Frauen in alten Griechenland*, München, 1995, 146.

¹⁴ Zeitlin, 1984, 175.

thus establish tyranny in Argos, which is regarded as the "rule of two females" – the gynecocracy.¹⁵

In the following plays of the trilogy Aeschylus offers his own interpretation of the gynecocratic myth. The playwright establishes a new principle of relations between the female and male forces. He presents the way to create a new system, at the end of which on the basis of agreement the hierarchical model of sex interrelations is built.

Aeschylus had to resolve certain problems in order to establish the new interrelation between the sex forces – the principle of subordinating woman to man. First of all, he had to present Clytemnestra – the female force – as an extremely negative phenomenon in order to justify her future subordination. And in fact, in the "Libation Bearers" the queen is presented as the mother-tyrant, who neglects not only matrimonial relations, but also those between mother and children. She makes her children's life unbearable and poses obstacles to their future. Besides, Clytemnestra is a dangerous force at the public level as well; at first, she creates the so-called "ritual" deadlock, and then the social one as well, which means, that under her rule, the social order is rendered invalid.¹⁶ We carried out a particularly thorough analysis of the well-known ode of the "Libation Bearers", which scholars call the "misogynic" ode. After reciting various criminal deeds committed by women towards men, the chorus links Clytemnestra's story with the myth of the Lemnian women – the myth, that tells how wives murdered their husbands, which resulted in the total extermination of men and the absolute domination of women. Through this association, Aeschylus gives a warning – Clytemnestra, the uncontrolled force in general, represents a danger to the whole society. Such an ideology prepares the ground not only to justify Orestes' murder of Clytemnestra, but also to accept future subordination of women to men.

On the other hand, the male force should also be subjected to alterations for the establishment of the new system. It should no more be the subject for criticism – such as was the character of Agamemnon in the previous play. The new male character – Orestes is presented as a positive force in the "Libation Bearers". Aeschylus succeeds to offer such an image of Orestes by means of uniting several factors: Firstly, Orestes is the person, who fulfills the god's order, and who gradually acknowledges, that the murder of Clytemnestra – the killer of her husband, the mother, who rejected her children, the tyrant of Argos – is his duty. Secondly, Orestes is well aware of the fact that the task is very hard to accomplish. He regards the murder of his mother as an unholy act, a blasphemy, and feels the necessity for purgation. Thirdly, Orestes fights

¹⁵ Zeitlin, 1984; Gagarin, 1976; Grossmann G., *Promethie und Orestie*, Heidelberg, 1970.

¹⁶ Zeitlin, 1984, 145...

for the interests of both spaces – for the restoration of *oikos* as well as for the liberation of *polis*. And the character, which protects the interests of both spaces, is presented as the winner at the end of drama as a rule.

Nevertheless, these two points – positive presentation of a male and negative of a female – did not prove sufficient for the establishment of the new model of relations of the sex forces. It was necessary to solve the conflict that existed within *oikos* between its two institutions – blood ties and matrimonial bonds. Clytemnestra, the murderer of her husband, who revenged for Iphigenia's death, represented blood relationship; while Orestes, who took vengeance upon his mother for his father's death, claimed the priority of matrimony. Aeschylus had to resolve this conflict by means of attaching preference to either of the institutions, i.e. to one of the sex forces. The murder of Clytemnestra did not serve a solution to the dilemma, as the murder, according to the Aeschylean conception, did not indicate the elimination of the negative female force. On the contrary, after Clytemnestra's death, the negative female force is represented by even more negative phenomenon – incarnations of Clytemnestra – the Furies (*Erinyes*).

The conflict is resolved in the final play of the trilogy the "Eumenides". Under the verdict of the Areopagus, the significance of a male parent to the child was admitted superior and matrimonial bonds were declared more important, than blood relationship; correspondingly, Orestes was acquitted and the superiority of the male over the female was ultimately acknowledged.

The final step was the transformation of the Furies, who represented the negative principle, altogether dangerous to life. The Furies became Eumenides – the benevolent forces. By means of such a transformation, the political power of women was transferred to the sphere of religion, cult. Thus, the female force was subordinated to the male force, and the system of patriarchal relations, the patriarchal family prevailed.

The study enabled us to draw the following conclusion regarding the interrelations between this trilogy and the women of Athenian society: Through picturing Clytemnestra, the dominant female, the author presents the most difficult conflict, which existed in Athens of that epoch between two institutions of *oikos* – matrimony and γένη – blood relationship. Besides, Clytemnestra's image serves to show how much problematic was the phenomenon of the uncontrolled female force to Greek consciousness in that period. Greeks believed, that this force impeded the functioning of the society, and on the broader scale, prevented the progress of the society. In order to realize the significance of the phenomenon and its danger, it should have been represented by the most powerful force, the most powerful character.

The Aeschylean conception of woman implies the necessity to subdue, tame, and curb this force, which in fact is accomplished through the transformation of the Furies in the end of the tragedy.

The Aeschylean conception of women echoes traditional suggestions about the female nature. At the same time, the playwright himself introduces new cultural clichés, which to a remarkable extent determined the main tendencies of the attitude towards woman in classical Athens.

Of Sophocles' works we chose the tragedy "Antigone" as this play very clearly reveals the basic confrontation between the private and the public spheres through the functioning of its gender system. Among other problems our study also investigates as to what extent the characters of Creon and Antigone are identified with the institutions of family and state.

The research conducted made it clear, that Antigone stood for one aspect of *oikos* – blood ties, γένη. The accomplishment of the interests of this type of relationship was, as evidenced in Aeschylus' tragedy, connected with the female force. Through her sacrifice to blood relationship, she, in fact, gave up the other aspect of *oikos* – marriage, i.e. – deprived herself, as a woman, of the generative function¹⁷. In our opinion, this conflict, which existed in Antigone's female role, was the echo of the very important inner tension between two institutions of *oikos* in that period. Out of these two aspects of *oikos* – the rival of polis, the new civil institution, was that of blood relationship, and the admission of the latter's primacy would mean the acknowledgement of the predominance of the female generative function, and of the female phenomenon on the whole – that of mother, the earth, the nature.¹⁸ Therefore, the conflict of these institutions of *oikos* can be considered with respect to the opposition – nature × culture as well.

Antigone's religious stand is treated separately. In fact, this position can be analyzed with regard to Antigone's devotion to blood relationship, as she observes the rite of burying the dead at the price of her life paying tribute to her blood kin – her brother. While observing the rite, Antigone believes, that gods are her allies and therefore, the human law, or more precisely, the tyrant's command is of no importance to her.

We have also studied Creon's conception of family, which scholars regard as the political perspective of family and which viewed family as a disciplined unity like polis. Besides, Creon's position completely denies the importance of blood ties. Moreover, he regards the devotion to kin, and love

¹⁷ Sorum Ch., "The Family in Sophocles' "Antigone" and "Electra", CW, vol. 75, № 4, 1982, 201-211, 205.

¹⁸ Segal C. P., "The Menace of Dionysus: Sex Roles and Reversals in Euripides' "Bacchae", *Arethusa* 11, 1978, 185-202, 187.

likewise, as the phenomenon, loyalty to which proves harmful to the state interests¹⁹.

The study of Creon's relationship with the public area gave an interesting picture. Creon's wrong position does not reveal itself in the tragedy from the beginning. As the drama starts, Creon presents himself as the servant of polis. The genuine nature of Creon's rule is gradually exposed – first, as he encounters Antigone, and then during his dialogue with Haemon. His confrontation with his son evidences, that the Theban ruler represents not the state, but one particular type of authority – tyranny. For this very reason, Creon failed to see, that the mutual complementarity of these two institutions was inevitable.

In our study a special attention is paid to the problem of Antigone's gender role inversion. Although Antigone asserts family interests, the traditional female sphere, she has to accomplish this by a masculine type of behavior. Antigone intrudes into the public area. Such a masculine behavior on the part of a woman is unacceptable for Creon. Most unbearable for the king is the fact, that a woman defied his command. He declares unambiguously, that he is not going to tolerate women's domination over him. Creon believes, that Antigone, as his son's bride, can be freely replaced with another woman. He does not regard woman as an individual. According to the conception, which finds male semen more important for the continuity of the generation, naturally, any women will do.

The lot, that fell to the central characters at the end of the tragedy, in our opinion, apparently, points to what Sophocles believed to be the right attitude towards the public and domestic areas. In the finale, both protagonists revise / change their positions. Antigone admits the existence of another duty. She says, that she went against the will of the citizens and performed the burial solely for her brother's sake; that she would not do this in case of husband or children (Ant., 907). At the end of the drama, Antigone is physically destroyed. Evidently, Sophocles did not consider it right to serve to one area at the price of neglecting the other.

Creon not only revises, but also changes his position altogether. The Theban king acknowledges the necessity of protecting family interests as well as of observing the divine laws. However, his remorse was late. He is punished; he loses his son and his wife. His wrong service to the public area inflicts harm on the city – the corpse left unburied offends gods and profanes the city. Creon, left alive, is ruined morally. The following conclusion may be drawn – one will be successful, and one's service to the domestic and public areas will be right only if one admits the interests of both areas.

¹⁹ Cf. Knox B.M.W., *The Heroic Temper*, p. II, Berkeley and Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1964, 93...

We started the analysis of Euripides' dramas with the tragedy the "Alcestis". The tragedy proved challenging, as it provided quite interesting material for the investigation of the relationship of the literary fiction with social norms. We posed the problem in the following way – how is Alcestis' behavior to be understood – was her self-sacrifice for her husband's sake, and in a broader meaning, wife's extreme devotion to husband a norm in the author's contemporary society, or was it the matrimonial ideal set by the society?²⁰

The study showed, that Alcestis' behavior and Admetus' appraisal of such self-sacrifice make up two perspectives – male and female – of the drama. For the male perspective, the subject was Admetus, and it did not treat the king's deed critically. As for the female perspective, it was altogether directed to Alcestis and acknowledged the queen as the only and the best wife, while considering Admetus guilty. We traced how the male perspective altered in parallel with the development of the play. The change of Admetus' position was especially remarkable. The king realized, that Alcestis' – his wife's self-sacrifice brought him only unendurable life and the name of a coward.²¹ The revised appreciation of Alcestis' and Admetus's behaviors, the emotional chaos caused by Alcestis' death, and, especially, the king's tragic realization lead us to a certain conclusion – Alcestis' behavior, and in its broader understanding, the extreme devotion to husband, should not have been the norm of matrimonial relationship in Euripides' contemporary epoch. Along with it, we believe, that the drama also implies Euripides' attitude as well. The tragedist not only rejected this cultural ideal, but also treated it with the criticism typical of him. This is demonstrated in depicting Admetus humiliated and gripped with the complex of guilt.

The interpretation of "Alcestis" throws light on Euripides' conception of matrimonial relationship and woman's role in marriage. It runs all through the tragedist's dramas that deal with sex relationship – the proper functioning of a family, of a household is possible if the roles and importance of both subjects are admitted. We have also compared the play "Alcestis" to the "Odyssey" with respect to the parallels between the motifs, plot elements and the images of Penelope and Alcestis. Despite certain similarity, Alcestis and Penelope, Odysseus and Admetus are quite different from each other. Together with the significant artistic and ideological factors, which cause these differences, what strikes the eye is, that in partner relationship, woman's role undergoes obvious decline. This, on its part, is the response to the fact, that in the classi-

²⁰ Vellacot P., *Irony Drama, A Study in Euripides' Method and Meaning*, Cambridge, 1975, 102.

²¹ Very stimulating observation of these perspectives is presented in Luschig, see Luschig C. A., *The Gorgon's Severed Head, Studies of "Alcestis," "Electra" and "Phoenissae"*, Mnemosyne, Bibliotheca Classica Batava, ed. Brill E. J., Lieden, New-York, Köln, 1995.

cal period, the social status of woman altered compared to the heroic epoch, the alteration being directed towards the decline.

While discussing Euripides' "Medea" we have treated several questions: First of all, we decided to reveal whether the character of Medea deals with the social problematic of Euripides' times. From one point, this seems a bit curious, taking into consideration that Euripides was considered as a "carrier of feminist ideas" exactly due to the artistic interpretation of "Medea". And yet the problem existed because a group of scientists completely excluded the daughter of Aetes from the world of Greek women, as they considered the main sign of Medea's image was her magic nature and foreign origin²².

The research showed up that in some cases Euripides really points out Medea's magical nature. The finale of the tragedy – Medea's disappearance with the help of Deus ex Machina – raises a lot of questions. Like a number of scientists (Cunningham, Knox), we also think that a final episode of this kind and the interpretation of Medea's image in the episode is a mark of qualitative changes taking place in the soul of the heroine²³. Those changes are considered to be the transformation of Euripides' Medea into so-called "non-human essence". To our opinion, the introduction of the magic plast of Medea is needed to emphasize the irrational power, "non-human essence" of Colchian woman. Due to the high surplus of the irrational, Medea is identified with the wild force, the force that was associated with female origins in Greek imagination. Moreover, Medea of Euripides not only stands side by side with "dangerous and destructive" women, but also by her deep artistic and emotional influence greatly strengthens the negative image of a woman, the woman conception considering female force dangerous for the civilization.

On the other hand, our survey revealed, that Medea's foreign origin is not the reason to exclude her altogether from the circle of ordinary Greek women. For example, Jason expects from Medea-wife the wifely obedience typical for the Athenian women. Only in the final scene, when Medea has already killed her children, Jason draws a demarcation border between his wife and Greek women.

We have also discussed Medea's image as a heroine – the follower of the heroic code. A number of features of the daughter of Aetes, her speech, moral principles, etc, form this very plast²⁴. The following episodes present Medea in heroic terms: the scene of Medea's exposition; the scene where

²² Schmid W. –Stählin O., *Geschichte der griechischen Literatur*, B. III, München, 1940; Grube G. M. A., *The Drama of Euripides*, London, 1941.

²³ Cunningham M. P., "Medea ἀπὸ μηχανῆς", CP, 1954, v. 49, #3, 151-160; Knox B. M. W., "The Medea of Euripides," YCS 25, 1979, 193-225.

²⁴ Medea as a heroic figure is discussed thoroughly in Knox, 1979.

Medea speaks with the Chorus, after meeting Creon; and the dialogue of Medea and Chorus, after Medea's meeting with Aegeus. The last episode, where Medea ends up her speech with the heroic credo, is to be especially mentioned.

We hold that the above-discussed features of Medea may not be considered as an obstacle for suggesting, that the heroine had reference with social problematic of Euripides' time. To explain the resemblances and differences between Medea and ordinary women, we discussed the attitudes of Medea and ordinary women towards "family problems". On the other hand, the attitudes of both Medea (a woman) and Jason (a pragmatic man) towards these problems are fixed in the research. The analysis showed the following results: female characters – the Chorus of Corinthian women and the nurse offer Medea their condolences and blame Jason, though they think that Medea's mourning and suffering is superfluous. Most of all, disagreement between Medea and the Chorus appears in the speech where Medea declares about the plan of killing her own children. The murder of children appalls them. The Colchian woman dares to reject the most Sacred, the sense of life. According to the Chorus, such kind of an action goes far beyond the unhappy story of an ordinary woman and transfers to other dimension.

Study of the position of Jason towards "family problems" showed that in marriage issues he pays attention mainly to public facade – political alliance formed by marriage bonds and to prosperity and careless life as well. Private life and love seem less valuable for him. Children for Jason are useful and important attributes for providing a respectable position of the head of the *oikos*. The analysis revealed the differences between the female and male systems of values concerning "family problems".

The research, that was carried on provides with the possibility to make the following conclusions: at the beginning Medea expresses the interests of the family space (Medea served as the best wife for Jason), and it is Jason who rejects his own family. He is seeking for the higher status and public recognition with the help of the new family circle. Medea refuses to obey the rejection of the family interests, she takes a revenge in her family space, but in her own space Medea acts in heroic terms, that is typical for another sphere – public sphere. The transmission of the public space habitual model into the private space is a clear evidence of her connection with the public space. When the habitual model that is typical for one definite space is utilized in another, absolutely different space regulated with its own laws, it may cause a catastrophe, destruction of the space where these models were transmitted.

The analysis of the gender system of the tragedy ascertained the dislocation of the female and male values including an explosive, dangerous element. According to Euripides' conception, improperly allocated female and

male values may cause a catastrophe identical to that described in the tragedy "Medea". It seems that the dramatist questioned the relevance of marriage norms of his time and considered their new interpretation as vital.

So far, Medea's relationship with Athens's social reality is clear, but at the same time her difference from other women is also evident. This difference is created with the combination of her nature, character, origin, past history, strong rejection of betrayal, and the final act of the tragedy – killing of her children. This very paradoxical coexistence in Medea's image (on the one hand, the woman who is connected with Athens' social problematic and on the other hand the woman who is different from ordinary Athenian women) creates the problematic character of her artistic image that was an obstacle to discuss the heroine in the social context.

From this point of view Medea's artistic image is an evidence of difficulties, which appear while studying the relationship between artistic image (literature) and life. Artistic image is a complex multi-planned phenomenon formed of many parts, the different aspects of which are the codes deciphering cultural values of the epoch.

In the tragedy "Iphigenia in Aulis" the complex relationship of the private and public spheres is presented through the gender system of the play. Besides, here Euripides put a special emphasis on the importance of the subjective, private factor in fulfilling the sexes' cultural role.

The character of Agamemnon in this play is the example of complexity imposed on the male gender role. Discussing the relation of Agamemnon with private and public spaces we found out, that the two roles of Agamemnon (head of the family and commander of the army) continuously influenced each other. This influence relied on the following aspects. The first aspect – the conflict between the spaces was an objective circumstance. Though this fact itself was not the necessary condition for the character's failure. Orestes is an example of how the person can act for the interests of both spaces. From Euripides' viewpoint, the dilemma of Agamemnon was caused mainly by the subjective factor – his character was not able to establish the balance between his two roles. The main reason of this was the disharmony in his soul. According to the cultural stereotype declared by the Chorus, the virtue of harmony was necessary for the male gender. The author believed, that Agamemnon's ambitious nature, unlimited selfishness and private, careerist goals interfered him to gain this harmony.

Besides, the analysis revealed that characters' devotion to this or that space was not firm²⁵. This very instability indicates, that preference made in

²⁵ For the problem of instability of the characters in the play see: Griffin J., "Characterization in Euripides: "Hippolytus" and "Iphigenia in Aulis", in: Characterization and Individuality in

favour of one or another space was based on the subjective factor. In case of Agamemnon, when he considered that the duty of an army commander was not as important as family interests, he believed, that war was a useless event, based on irrational impulses and aimed to satisfy only one's own goals. But later on Agamemnon's opinion about the war changes and he speaks about high, patriotic goals of the war.

In our survey we discussed the character of Clytemnestra, as the system of women values is very important in her image. Clytemnestra's gender role shows how the results of the war and its influences are reflected in the family space. Besides, the queen pays quite a big attention to proper fulfillment of woman activities. She follows the established female norms unless the system she supported betrays her (the sacrifice of her daughter)²⁶.

The character of Iphigenia in the tragedy is the example of the restriction imposed on the female gender role, whereas her deed, perpetrated at the end of the play, reveals that a woman's cultural role bears a potential useful for the society.

In the light of the relationship between woman and society, the artistic image of Iphigenia is especially important in Greek tragic corpus. Iphigenia gives life for her motherland acting from her own will. She transforms the necessity (her sacrifice for the success of the war) into the private wish. In her last speech Iphigenia mentions those values that she considers the most important, and she is ready to give her life for them. According to Iphigenia, the unity of the citizens is more important, than the life of an individual; man's life is more valuable, than that of a woman. God's will is higher, than human's. It's impermissible for Greek people to be subordinated to barbarians. As these are the values of social space, the scientists suggest, that by her speech and action Iphigenia assumes the male role²⁷. They suppose, that Iphigenia's concentration on her future fame can serve as the confirmation for this opinion. It seems to us, that in Iphigenia's case we can speak about the inversion of the gender role. This is confirmed first of all by the fact that the virgin acts to protect male values.

Besides, the character of Iphigenia could be discussed from a different point of view and considered to be an ideal woman. She is an exceptional figure in the Greek tragedy. This is a woman who acts within the frames of social space, but unlike other women she does not do any harm to that space,

Greek Literature, Oxford, 1989, 128-149, 142; also Snell B., "From Tragedy to Philosophy: "Iphigenia in Aulis" in: Greek Tragedy in Action, London, 1978, 396-405, 397.

²⁶ Gamel M. K., Introduction to "Iphigenia at Aulis" in: *Women on the Edge, Four Plays by Euripides* (edd.) Blondell R., Gamel M. K., Rabinowitz N. S., Zweig B., New York, London, Routledge, 1999, 305-328, 347.

²⁷ Gamel, 1999, 316.

on the contrary, she appears to be the rescuer of the space. The fact that Iphigenia agrees to admit the sacrifice reduces the tension of the conflict. As Foley discusses very convincingly, her action is benevolent for her motherland because she serves to the social space from the religious sphere, the only sphere where women were permitted to participate. Iphigenia is an ideal character, ideal woman who gave her life for the public interests of her own free will. She was able to make proper contact with the gods through her "love policy"²⁸.

Euripides' "Helen" is an especially interesting play from the point of relations between literature and art: the raise of the interest to the family space in society (the end of the 5th century) is followed by the appearance of love plot in literature. "Helen" by Euripides based on such a plot is a clear example of the deep interrelation of these spheres.

The plot based on love motifs provides us with remarkable material concerning the functioning of the gender system. It is very important to reveal the innovation that dealt with gender roles of men and women. The analysis of the play displayed that men and women have different systems of values and consequently their attitudes towards the essence-points of the play are different. But in our opinion, one point is especially important here: Euripides did not suggest that these different values were completely irreconcilable. Moreover, the final scene proves that a person will gain success if he/she uses female and male values to supplement each other. The success does not include only the result. The combination of the values is necessary first of all for the perfect functioning of a person. Helen's help, the involvement of women values and means was necessary for the revival of the lost identity of Menelaos. What about Helen, she had to escape from Egypt and return home to gain the name of the devoted wife and thus to identify herself, and that was impossible without Menelaos's help, without male force. It seems to us, that Menelaos and Helen could escape the inevitable disaster only because they inactivated the values and means of both sexes at the same time²⁹.

Finally, the analysis carried out with the purpose of explaining the discrepancy between the low social status of Athenian women and women images in the Greek tragedy, enabled us to draw the following conclusions:

1. Instead of "discrepancy" we propose to use another term, namely "interrelation", as more appropriate. Alongside the scholars of "social conflicts theory", we assume, that the Greek tragedy is the genre of literature, which does not mirror the social context directly; neither does it reflect straightforwardly the tensions peculi-

²⁸ Foley H., *Ritual Irony: Poetry and Sacrifice in Euripides*, Ithaca, 1985.

²⁹ For a different interpretation of the final scene see Segal Ch., "The Two Worlds of Euripides' "Helen", *TAPA* 102, 1971, 553-614.

ar of women social role. These tensions -ambivalence occurred in every sphere of Athenian women's life – are represented in the tragedy, which stands as a symbolic arena for the reflection of the social problems through artistic codes and ciphers characteristic of its artistic milieu.

2. The interrelation between powerful women images of the tragedy and the social status of Athenian women is indeed very interesting. The very fact of the existence of significant women images isn't merely accidental. Notwithstanding their low social status, women in Athenian society had important social functions. Tensions between the two main Athenian institutions – the family and the state were central for the society of the classical epoch. Consequently, women holding a leading position in one of these institutions, i.e. family, were likewise interesting and important for the tragedy as well.

3. In our opinion, the discussed tragedies revealed the extent to which women's role was important in Athenian society. "Oresteia" by Aeschylus showed the significance of a proper definition of women's place for a normal functioning of a civilization on the whole. The trilogy depicted the complexity embedded in the institution of the family itself – the tension between a blood relationship and marriage. Sophocles developed this problem further in his tragedy "Antigone", where it was a woman defending blood relationship, the main rival of the polis – a newly established social institution. As for Euripides, in his tragedies interfamilial conflicts do not have a public nature any more. The "Alcestis", "Medea", "Helen" reveal the importance of a private space, of personal experience for a human existence as a whole. And more importantly, they show, that improperly assigned female and male values contain explosive, dangerous elements. The tragic poet also revealed the perspective born by woman cultural role – the possibility of woman's benevolent service for the society, which at the same time can be considered as an expansion of a woman's social role.

In the tragedy, the central medium for the 5th century B.C. Athenians, very interesting processes take place with regard to the interrelation of literary and social contexts. The tragedy follows cultural norms. Besides, it essentially reflects the social changes of the late V century B.C., focusing attention particularly on the private space. Thus, the tragedy contributes to the creation of the new cultural clichés. The reciprocal process – tragedy influencing social life and visa versa – proves once again that it is very important to research the ways of interrelations between these spaces in order to study the current processes in both spheres.